



Research and Reference Service

OVERSEAS REACTIONS TO
PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S CUBAN ANNOUNCEMENT
(As of 3:30 p.m., October 23)

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This is a research report, not a statement of Agency policy

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SUMMARY

President Kennedy's Cuba Quarantine statement stimulated immediate and heavy news coverage throughout most of the world. Editorial comment was extensive in Western Europe but as yet spotty elsewhere with official government announcements taking the spotlight in the free world. Little or no comment has been noted from Africa, the Middle East, and the so-called neutrals in Southeast Asia.

In Western Europe strong, virtually unequivocal support came from West Germany, Italy, and the Scandinavian countries. In Great Britain editorial comment was mixed ranging from considerable support to outright criticism. Much of this comment was qualified with serious reservations. In France editorial opinion was divided.

Comment from Latin America, South Korea, and staunch U.S. allies in Southeast Asia also gave unqualified support to the President's strong stand.

In the Middle East and South Asia limited headline reports indicate considerable concern over increasing tension between the great powers.

Soviet propaganda indicated the country had been caught off-guard and was defensive in nature with a tendency to avoid the real issues and concentrate on vituperation. Satellite comment was more extensive and attempted to follow the Soviet "line."

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WESTERN EUROPE

Initial media reaction to the President's Cuba statement ranged from considerable endorsement to some open criticism. Generally, support was most unequivocal among German media and so far as available quite favorable among Scandinavian and Italian papers. French papers were divided, while criticism was most pronounced in the British press. Hopes that a direct confrontation of the US and the USSR in the Caribbean could be avoided was mingled with concern over a deterioration of the situation elsewhere, as in Berlin. The US decision was variously ascribed to the need for halting Communist threats in the Western hemisphere, the desirability of taking the initiative in view of other crises and purely domestic considerations. The Administration's contention of a clear and present danger from Cuban missile bases was nowhere seriously challenged. In some instances, however, parallels were drawn to US missile establishments abroad which the USSR had tolerated for years. The President was praised for taking the issue to the UN but criticized particularly in British and French papers for not sufficiently consulting his allies. The overall impression prevailed that while the US actions had exacerbated East-West relations and intensified the Cold War, they did not make a military conflict unavoidable.

Media in several continental countries were outspoken in their support for the new US policy on Cuba. This support was largely predicated on awareness that the Soviet buildup in Cuba had provoked necessary US retaliation. Moderate-left Paris-Jour, Paris, held that the "peace has been compromised in the Caribbean since Khrushchev dispatched war material to Fidel Castro." Influential, independent Die Welt, Hamburg, stated that "Kennedy wants to obviate dangers which obviously are being considered as very serious... America demonstrates that the time of being pushed around has passed." Conservative Berlingske Tidende, Copenhagen, spoke for many other papers in the smaller countries of Western Europe when it remarked "firmness has its

justification when it is called for by a policy which in its provocative character contradicts declared assurances." To this Catholic-Labor La Cite, Brussels, added bluntly "the Soviet Union, in this matter, is the accused." The President's action was also welcomed by papers which gave the possible connection of Cuba and Berlin considerable thought. Thus, conservative Le Figaro, Paris maintained that "any weakness in the face of Soviet activities in Cuba... would soon have been taken as evidence of greater weakness in that other nerve center, Berlin."

Berlin, however, served as the focal point of much anxiety as to possible future developments. Independent General-Anzeiger, Bonn, indicated that while it was premature to tie Cuba and Berlin together, "this tie might develop soon." The Financial Times, London, declared that "a showdown in the Western enclave in Berlin" is "much more likely /than a Caribbean clash/ and a perfect countermove in brinkmanship." There was more concern that the Western allies of the US could be drawn into a general war against their will. In this vain left-center Dauphine Libere, Grenoble, spoke of the danger that "the members of the Atlantic alliance... could be dragged willy-nilly into a full-scale conflict."

Critical comments on the US decision were most numerous in British and French papers. The President was seen as having given in to strong domestic pressures, presumably enhanced by considerations of the forthcoming elections. Financial Les Echos, Paris, commented editorially that "the election issue cannot be ruled out." The conservative Daily Mail, London, in an acid comment remarked "the world cannot help fearing that in thus advancing to the brink of war, President Kennedy may have been led more by popular emotion than by calm statesmanship." By contrast, semi-official Social-Democratic Stockholm Tidningen argued that the announced US moves must be considered "relatively moderate considering the state of public opinion in the United States."

There was also criticism in the French and British press about the alleged failure of the Administration to consult the Western allies beforehand. The deGaulлист La Nation, Paris, termed it regrettable that Washington did not consult Europe in reaching the grave decision. In the British press criticism was most generally levelled at the President for imposing a blockade which in the words of conservative Daily Telegraph, London, was "greatly mistimed" and in the opinion of the Guardian could "in the end /make/ the United States find that it has done its cause, its friends and its interests little good." The latter paper also referred caustically to "what is sauce for Cuba, is also sauce for Turkey, Berlin and other places."

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Although media generally recognized the gravity of the international situation and expected in the words of the liberal Journal de Geneve "the Soviet leaders to take up the challenge", there remained some hope that all-out military conflict could be avoided. Several papers stressed the fact that the President had not failed to couple the measures outlined with "an appeal for peace spoken by a great country at the very moment when it is compelled to adopt exceptional steps... to keep away the spectre of war" (Centrist Il Messaggero, Rome). Along the same lines independent Information, Copenhagen, thought that the President "offers Khrushchev so many possibilities to back out in a discreet way... that there should be no actual danger of a Third World War." Mass circulation France-Soir, Paris, speculated on the possibility of a "dialogue between the two K's" in a last-minute effort to save peace.

LATIN AMERICA

President Kennedy's speech received extensive coverage by the media. Simultaneous Spanish translations were broadcasts by the national networks in at least four countries. Official and public reactions constituted strong support of the US "quarantine" and included some implicit concrete commitments to collective support of that action. The Cuban radio called the blockade "an act of war."

Latin American support for the US decision to "quarantine" shipping to Cuba began to express itself immediately following President Kennedy's speech on October 22. All the media gave the speech extremely heavy and prominent play. A commentator for La Voz de Chile (Santiago) stated that "we are facing the most important of dilemmas: either the Soviet Union will stop its aggressive actions and immediately retreat from its military positions, or the world will have to face the consequences." Radio Panama reported that "President Kennedy's move . . . is a well-planned answer to . . . international communism" and added that "indecision is unjustifiable and the only action to be taken is the conclusive and urgent measure warranted by the circumstances." Public reaction in Peru and Colombia reflected fear of war, but relaxed when it became clear that the US intention was to "quarantine" Cuba rather than start a "nuclear holocaust."

Official reaction was quick and strong in support of the US action. President Lopez Mateos of Mexico, whose government has been against "intervention" in Cuba, stated publicly that "if the type of armament changes [from defensive to offensive] then the approach of the Mexican government to the problem will also change." An Argentine official stated that his country will back the US "in toto." President Idigoras of Guatemala stated that the US "has awakened to reality [and that] Guatemala will fight if necessary." President Orlich of Costa Rica declared his nation's "absolute solidarity" with the US plan.

Cuban reaction has been negligible and the media seem to be waiting for Premier Castro's speech later today. Havana CMQ Television commentator Gomez Wanguemert told Cubans that a recent "Gallup poll showed that three-fourths of the US people do not want a direct military attack on Cuba. [But] Kennedy is now telling this mass of people . . . that rocket bases exist in Cuba [with] rockets [that] can carry war-heads to US cities." Radio Havana announced that "everyone knows that a blockade is an act of war."

Coverage

Reaction thus far has been limited to official statements from Japan, South Korea, the Republic of China (Taiwan) and Australia, plus a smattering of media comment from the area. Southeast Asian nations have yet to respond to the President's speech. Straight news coverage is on a front-page, top-play basis in Japan, and similar emphasis can be expected from other area media.

Approval of U.S. Action

Press and official reaction from the Republic of China (Taiwan) and South Korea voiced full and complete support for the "determined and necessary" decision of the President. Taiwan, which has repeatedly called for a stronger U.S. policy on Cuba, tempered its praise with the expression of the opinion that a blockade may not be enough at this point, and noted that reverberations of the action may be felt in the Taiwan Straits. Tonga Ilbo (Seoul, anti-Communist) stated its welcome for the "...timely, positive action taken by the U.S. on Cuba" and declared that "all non-Communist nations of the world should not spare all-out support and cooperation for this U.S. action...." Similar, if less ringing, support was given the President's action by Prime Minister Menzies of Australia who stated the hope that "...his statement and the steps to be taken pursuant to it will bring home to the Soviet Union the nature of the consequences which may flow from its overseas policies". A single comment from the Philippines, while essentially factual in its appraisal of the situation, indicated low-keyed support for the U.S. policy step.

Japanese Coolness

Spokesmen for the left-wing Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and the moderate Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) attacked the Presidential action as "interference" in Cuban affairs and a "threat to world peace". The Foreign Office issued a statement which termed the development "regrettable", but stated that it seemed that "...the United States was obliged to adopt such an attitude because of unavoidable reasons". Available media comment does not yet reflect the full impact of the U.S. action, but strong second-guessing can be expected from Japan's neutralist press.

NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

Lacking editorial comment from the Near East and South Asia, the only indication of anticipated mounting crisis is in the few press headlines available.

Headlines in the Cairo press--the only ones available so far--are saying that the "dreadful crisis heralds the most serious consequences." Radio Pakistan quoted UN General Assembly President Choudhury Mohammed Zafrullah Khan of Pakistan as saying that "if the facts are as stated by President Kennedy, this is the most acute crisis since the end of World War II."

Preoccupation with the Sino-Indian border dispute and continuing developments in the Yemen may decrease the amount of attention that would normally be given to an event of such significance.

AFRICA

Available reaction consists of heavy news coverage of President Kennedy's speech and other Cuban developments on radio stations in French-speaking West Africa and lighter attention on the stations in Ghana and Nigeria. There is no available comment.

While there is no comment available, the President's address and other developments concerning Cuba have drawn very heavy news treatment on most radio stations in French-speaking West Africa. Lesser attention has been noted on the radio stations in Accra and Lagos.

Stations in French-speaking areas, where governments are in general pro-West, devoted five to 15 minutes of news to the subject. In Volta, Togo, Cameroun, Dahomey, Mali and the Central African Republic the state-run stations devoted more than half their news time to the subject.

Most of these stations reported the Cuban mobilization, comment by world leaders, and summaries of the Kennedy address. Stations in Cameroon, Dahomey and Togo reported criticism of the address in certain communist papers in France. Radio Mali cited a Cuban government statement on American aims to overthrow the Cuban revolution. Ghana Radio later gave a four-minute report summarizing the Cuban mobilization, Kennedy's speech, and the Canadian suggestion that a fact-finding group representing non-aligned nations visit Cuba.

SOVIET UNION

Initial Soviet reaction to Cuba developments indicates that Moscow did not anticipate our moves. Soviet media sounded defensive; propaganda tended to avoid the real issues and to rely heavily on anti-American vituperation. Soviet propaganda has so far misinformed all its audiences about the heart of the President's charges and decisions. As far as can be ascertained, these crucial points have also been withheld from the Soviet people.

The TASS-transmitted Soviet Government statement is perhaps the most representative -- and authoritative -- example of factual omissions and distortions. It nowhere acknowledged or denied our charges of Soviet offensive missile bases on Cuban soil. It furthermore took no note of the President's warning of retaliation against the USSR in the case of a Cuban nuclear weapons attack in the Western Hemisphere. The Soviet Government also neglected to mention that the American blockade against Cuba is designed only to intercept weapons shipped to that country.

In addition, however, the Soviet Union moved quickly to maintain a "be-prepared" posture. It announced that there would be no release of servicemen who have completed their tours of duty and ordered the Soviet armed forces and the Warsaw Pact forces "to step up combat readiness." It also turned to the Warsaw Pact for certain coordinated preparedness moves, and, at home, began to gear up "popular" support for the Soviet regime's stand.

In a late TASS reaction to the President's speech, Moscow began to set in motion what could conceivably become an important theme in its future propaganda treatment of events:

According to Kennedy the threat to the Western Hemisphere and world peace stems not from the aggressive policy of the United States toward Cuba but from the friendly aid being rendered by the Soviet Union to the Cuban Republic in the face of provocative threats and hit-and-run attacks by American imperialism.

SATELLITE REACTION

In broad outline, Soviet Russia's East European Satellites tended to follow the general Moscow line in responding to the President's speech on Cuba. All media laid heavy stress on the "piratic" and "aggressive" policy of the United States in imposing a naval blockade. But none offered more than moral support "to the heroic Cuban people."

POLAND

Along with the other Satellites, Poland termed the blockade of Cuba an "act of aggression" taken under the "pretext" of an offensive military buildup in Cuba. Specifically, a domestic broadcast of Warsaw radio termed the President's statement that a series of rocket-launching sites is being built in Cuba "absurd and provocative." The broadcast then immediately went over to informing the Polish public of the reaction in Britain (a country traditionally enjoying among Poles a reputation of greater objectivity and political acumen than most of the other powers). A Foreign Office spokesman was reported to have refused to make an official statement. But "political quarters" in London were allegedly taken by surprise. That these "quarters" might have been composed only of Communists and fellow-travelers is indicated by the rather insidious twisting of facts in the phrase reporting their hope "that the United States will not provoke a new Suez adventure." (Poland's involvement in shipping cargo to Cuba is known. In March, 1962, a regular line using ten ships was inaugurated between Poland and Cuba.)

The most recent of the official Polish statements referring to Cuba was made by Gomulka on the occasion of his visit to East Germany, on October 19. There he said: "We disapprove of the brutal, colonialist and unlawful policy of blockade and diversions practiced by the United States against Cuba. We are convinced that thanks to the help from the socialist countries and many other states which reject a blockade of Cuba the heroic Cuban people will be able to defend their independence and revolutionary social achievements."

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Prague's domestic radio service sharply attacked President Kennedy's declaration on Cuba, stating that "President Kennedy's declaration amounts to open interference in the internal affairs of the

Cuban Republic." The new U.S. measures, it said, "grossly violate international law and increase world tension."

Rude Pravo stated baldly that "Kennedy's move is an act of force," "a war measure," "an aggressive piratical step," and a "flagrant provocation since the end of World War II." The President's references to the Soviet military buildup in Cuba were labelled "a clumsy assertion" and "a slander," "The USSR", Radio Prague stated, "does not need to build bases for medium range rockets" in Cuba because "it has reliable intercontinental rockets."

EAST GERMANY Mass media in the Soviet zone reacted quickly to President Kennedy's speech on Cuba.

Official propaganda took the line that a "complete naval blockade of Cuba" was ordered by the U.S. President on the pretext of "preventing the stationing of offensive weapons in Cuba." And it sought to refute this contention by recalling that Cuban President Dorticos had declared in the United Nations that Cuba did not intend any offensive measures against the United States.

In a commentary just a few hours before the U.S. President spoke, Radio East Berlin charged the "American War Ministry" (Department of Defense - Ed.) with "playing with fire." Taking notice of the U.S. military and naval concentration in the Caribbean, it had warned of "a dress rehearsal of the American War party for an attack on the Cuban revolution."

BULGARIA Radio Sofia told listeners today that President Kennedy had adapted "aggressive measures" by proclaiming a quarantine of Cuba. The searching of ships, it argued, "will represent an act of piracy defined by the norms of international law as a typical act of aggression." While avoiding mention of previous pledges of socialist help to Cuba, Radio Sofia indicated that foreign observers in the American capital interpreted the "blockade" as "a blatant encroachment on the freedom of navigation, an unceremonious attempt to stifle by brute force the Cuban Republic, and a dangerous threat to peace." In its service in English to Europe, BTA (Bulgarian Telegraph Agency), however, ascribed the self same comments to observers in Bulgaria.

BTA also reminded its audiences that the Soviet Union and all socialist countries had made it clear to potential aggressors that "every aggressive attempt against the island of freedom will end in a catastrophe for its initiators." "There is no doubt whatsoever," it said, quoting a previous statement in a major Bulgarian paper, "that Cuba's mighty friends will not leave her alone in the epic struggle in defense of the achievement of the revolution; there is no doubt that the world will unanimously condemn the disgraceful plotters."